



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
250 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02108-4619



Massachusetts Hospital
Association

MITT ROMNEY
GOVERNOR

KERRY HEALEY
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

RONALD PRESTON
SECRETARY

CHRISTINE C. FERGUSON
COMMISSIONER

[Massachusetts Hospital Association](http://www.masshospital.org)

December 31, 2003

Dear Colleague:

In the last four years we have sent multiple communications to hospitals regarding their responsibilities in addressing the related problems of emergency department patient boarding, overcrowding, and ambulance diversion. In the previous series of documents, we have offered tools to assist hospitals in developing practical approaches to these issues. These tools have included:

- Best Practices and Measures to improve bed flow and decrease Emergency Department boarding and overcrowding
- Uniform Standards and Definitions for hospital and pre-hospital providers to assure that all have a common understanding of policies and expectations
- An internet-based emergency department status system
- A triggered intervention disaster plan outlining steps for hospitals, regional EMS systems, and pre-hospital providers to follow to accommodate a surge in either inpatient or outpatient volume

These documents are all accessible on the Department's web site at:

<http://www.state.ma.us/dph/bhqm/ambdiv.htm>

The goal of these efforts is to move admitted patients out of the ED as quickly as possible (minimizing or eliminating boarding), in order to enable hospitals to maintain their capacity to accept and manage new patients presenting for emergency care.

As you are well aware, we are now faced with the prospect of a flu season that likely will severely tax all of our resources. It is therefore important that hospitals act in accordance with these guidance documents, implementing necessary best practices and measures and fully adopting the uniform standards and definitions. We believe that to achieve optimal effectiveness, hospitals will have implemented all of the hospital components of the Triggered Intervention Disaster Plan including the development of a Code Help Policy and appropriate Disaster Plans to accommodate a surge in either inpatient or outpatient volume, including integrated efforts with their communities. The Department requested and has now received copies of Code Help policies from all hospitals in the state. Examples of these policies will be placed on the Department's website as a resource for all to share.

It is the Department's intention to take whatever action is necessary to assure that all hospitals are meeting the expectations specified in this letter, but no further action should be necessary if we all work together to employ the tools offered above. Only by working together can we assure that the needs of communities across the state continue to be met while maintaining the emergency capacity of all hospitals to respond to peak periods of critical need

Thank you for your anticipated cooperation during this exceptional winter flu season.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Christine Ferguson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly legible.

Christine Ferguson
Commissioner

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ron Hollander". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly legible.

Ron Hollander
President